

Building a Statutory Youth Service Labour Party Consultation: Submission by the Sport and Recreation Alliance

The Sport and Recreation Alliance

The Sport and Recreation Alliance believes that the power of sport and recreation can change lives and bring communities together. Together with our members and in partnership with the wider sector, we make the most of opportunities and tackle the areas that provide a challenge. We provide advice, support and guidance to our members and the sector, who represent traditional governing bodies of games and sport, county sports partnerships, outdoor recreation, water pursuits, and movement and dance exercise. As the voice of the sector, we work with Government, policy makers and the media to make sure grassroots sport and recreation grows and thrives. Having an active nation is important as it delivers huge benefits to society and the millions of participants, volunteers, staff and spectators.

General Comments

The Alliance supports the overall concept contained within the Labour party's proposal for a statutory youth service, in particular that the service should promote participation in sport. Community sport, provided by local sports clubs, outreach programmes and community groups, makes a significant difference to young people's lives, particularly through improving physical and mental wellbeing, enhancing personal and social skills and reducing involvement in crime and reoffending.

While we recognise that the consultation is concerned primarily with youth services, we believe that action should be taken early on in children's lives to provide them opportunities to participate in a wide range of high quality sport and physical activity to support their development. Recent Alliance [research](#) evidences the rising prevalence of mental health illnesses, obesity and declining levels of activity among British children over the past 40 years. In our view these trends cannot continue.

Based on this research, our campaign [#RightToBeActive](#) calls on Government to commit to:

- Establishing a new law requiring local authorities to provide all children with the opportunity to be active
- Create a long-term strategy to transform the physical and mental wellbeing of our children through sport and physical activity
- Introduce legislation to make it a requirement for ministers and public bodies to put the United Nations Rights of the Child, the right to play and lead a healthy life, at the heart of decision making.

In this context, while we support the proposed function of the youth service 'to promote participation in sport' and to 'promote the health and well-being of young people and their healthy lifestyles', we would go further as we believe there should be a statutory duty on all local authorities to provide opportunities for children and

young people to be active and to promote sport and physical activity across all local service provisions including education, health and youth services.

a) National Charter for Youth Work

- **What do you think should be the role of the statutory youth service?**

We have no particular comment to make on the purposes and functions of the youth service. We support the proposed function to promote participation in sport and would suggest that this be widened to encompass participation in sport, outdoor recreation and physical activity to reflect the wide range of activities young people should be encouraged to pursue.

As outlined above, we believe further consideration should be given to extending a duty to all local authorities to provide and promote sport and physical activity opportunities for children and young people.

We would also urge the Labour Policy Forum to observe the Chief Medical Officer's [guidelines](#) for children and physical activity and to encourage local authorities to integrate this into their delivery of 'promoting the health and well-being of young people and their healthy lifestyles'.

The 'personal and social development of young people' is equally crucial and we know that participation in sport and recreation enables their personal and social development. Skills acquired through sport and recreation such as team work, time management and leadership will benefit them in the future within the workplace and are very often not learned in a typical classroom setting.

b) Labour's vision

- **What amendments, if any, should be made to Labour's vision for delivering a statutory youth service?**

As outlined above, we believe further consideration should be given to extending a duty to all local authorities to provide and promote sport and physical activity opportunities for children and young people.

In addition, given the variety of functions proposed – ranging from culture and the arts, sport, counselling and education opportunities – any proposed youth service will need to be supported at a national level by genuine cross-departmental working at ministerial level to be effective.

c) Service Delivery

At what age should statutory youth services be available to young people?

As outlined above, we believe further consideration should be given to extending a duty to all local authorities to provide and promote sport and physical activity opportunities for children and young people. This would extend to promoting sport and physical activity in early years and to providing support to families to be physically active.

Evidence from the Alliance's research report ['Why are We Failing our Children'](#) identifies that 75% of mental health illnesses develop before a child's 18th birthday. Subsequently, whilst youth services should support children from a young age in order to prevent illnesses, isolation and anti-social behaviours occurring initially, they should support a child until they reach this age.

- **What should the balance be between open access and targeted youth work?**

The balance between open access and targeted youth work should be determined by the purpose which the youth work is intending to fulfil. The Alliance would hope that where the local authority is hoping to 'deter criminal or antisocial behaviour', that local authorities take a proactive approach to targeting vulnerable and susceptible groups within communities. There is very good evidence to demonstrate that specific sports such as rugby and boxing have a significant impact on deterring reoffending. The Alliance urges the Labour Policy Forum to observe findings from the [independent review](#) published by Professor

Rosie Meeks demonstrating these findings, as well as [programmes](#) such as Street Games which in the past have reduced anti-social behaviour by 45% in Stoke-on-Trent. The aforementioned activities ought to be facilitated and replicated as preventative measures if the Labour Policy Forum intends local youth services to 'deter criminal or antisocial behaviour'.

Whilst criminal and antisocial behaviour is less prevalent amongst young females, as the Labour Policy Forum will be aware, young girls experience specific challenges of their own in their teenage years. Given this, [research](#) from the WHO demonstrates that girls who participate in sport are both less likely to drop out of school, and less likely to fall pregnant as teenagers. Participation in sport and physical activity provides young girls with a sense of self efficacy, self-worth and most importantly enables them to develop necessary support networks.

- **What role should national programmes such as NCS, voluntary sector, community and faith groups, businesses and commissioning play in supporting statutory youth services?**

We believe that all of the aforementioned stakeholders have the ability, in varying capacities, to support young people to transition into adulthood. In particular, the Alliance urges the Labour Policy Forum to consider the effective role grassroots and community sport organisations have played in advancing youth in both their employment and educational careers. A 2017 [study](#) carried out by Loughborough University showed that Greenhouse Sports' programme, a school-based sport delivery model, improves the life chances of pupils from disadvantaged inner city backgrounds. In fact, it was found that Greenhouse sport participants out-performed non-participating pupils by 30-40% in English and Maths. Likewise, the program [Coping Through Football](#) helps participants battling mental health issues by improving their self esteem, confidence and social skills. Significant improvements were found in participants' quality of life with 50% of participants achieving employment, education or volunteering outcomes.

The Alliance's Game of Life research reports that [61% of employers are dissatisfied](#) with graduates' self-management skills. Team-orientated sports delivered at grassroots level including football and netball teach participants cooperation, effective time management and the value of respect and sportsmanship, all of which are valued within any workplace. [Research](#) by British Universities and Colleges Sport shows that 94 per cent of employers, identified a clear link between participation in university sport and the development of valuable skills and strengths in potential employees.

d) Youth Voice

- **How can we ensure that young people's voices are at the centre of a new statutory youth service?**

Where any programme, service or facility is expected to impact children and young people, young people must form an integral part of the design and decision-making process. As a minimum, they should be engaged in an advisory capacity during the development and ongoing review of a new statutory youth service, but best practice should be to establish stronger, more formal protocols, such as integrating a Youth Board into the youth service's governance structures— though tokenism must be avoided and clear objectives for the group should be identified. Diversity of thought is essential for robust decision-making, and diversity of experience across age demographics is as important as gender balance, ethnic diversity and a broad range of skills, especially where the service delivered is primarily focused upon delivering for young people.

In June 2018, the Alliance published our *Young Board Members* [report](#) in partnership with the Youth Sport Trust. This selected a series of case studies from sport organisations who have established a youth voice within their structures and identified key learnings which might be applied across the sector. The Alliance is implementing a number of these at present, in particular establishing a Youth Advisory Panel to guide and challenge all of our work around children and young people. The report may provide useful insight to 'assist young people to... play a full part in the community' and 'secure active involvement... in decision making'.

Conclusion

A reform of the youth services policy to introduce a new statutory requirement on local authorities for the provision of Youth Services – and in particular one which includes the promotion of participation in sport – is broadly supported by the Alliance. However, we would encourage further consideration of a more general duty on local authorities to provide and promote sport and physical activity opportunities for children and young people across all relevant services, particularly as we know that participation in sport and physical activity supports improved health and wellbeing and enables children and young people to develop skills that will benefit their personal and social development.

The Alliance would be happy to provide the Labour Policy Forum with further information on our responses within the consultation, as well as our referenced foundation report, *Why are We Failing Our Children*.

Sport and Recreation Alliance
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